Standardisation and the school: norm tolerance in the educational domain

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Abstract

This article will do two things. Firstly, it describes an empirical investigation into the norm awareness/knowledge of a group of trainee teachers in southern Germany. This investigation was carried out on the basis of questionnaires aimed at establishing how much agreement exists regarding ‘correct’ German. The findings, which indicate that there is considerable variability in the informants’ judgements regarding ‘correct’ German are then presented and interpreted and the implications of this variability for pupils are discussed. In the second part of the article the author moves on to discuss critically the arguments for and against greater norm tolerance at schools, with reference to issues such as the role of a standard variety, the social and subjective dimensions of intelligibility, barriers to literacy and the implications of a more critical approach to the ‘appropriateness’ model of linguistic variation. The potential contribution of norm tolerance to an emancipatory education is discussed and the article ends with a plea for more reflection on language and on its role in the formation of individual identity and in social life.

1 Introduction

The first part of this article present the findings of an investigation into the norm awareness/knowledge of a group of trainee teachers in southern Germany. This investigation was inspired by Cameron’s comment that:

‘It is striking [...] that sociolinguists very often refer to the (overt) ‘prestige’ of standard English and assume that this is impressed on speakers by normative instruction carried out mainly in schools; yet I know of no study of how (or even whether) the norms of standard English are inculcated by teachers’ (1990: 92).

Despite the fact that similar assumptions regarding standard German underpin much of German sociolinguistics, there are few empirical studies that investigate what role teachers of German play in transmitting linguistic norms.
Teachers are assumed to be experts on the linguistic norm (e.g. in Ammon 1995: 75) and their job requires them to correct the linguistic behaviour of others, yet little is known about the nature of the norm they follow or about the way they adopt it and transmit it to pupils. The second part of the article discusses the arguments for and against greater norm tolerance at schools in order to establish whether it can really lead to a more ‘emancipatory’ education, emancipatory education being here understood as education ‘which works towards greater freedom and respect for all people, including ourselves’ (Janks & Ivanic 1992: 305).

2 The sociolinguistic background

There are various kinds of norms, e.g. Weinrich (1982: 8) refers to ‘stillschweigende Gewohnheiten des Sprachgebrauchs’ and contrasts them with ‘ausdrückliche Regelungen’ while the Duden-Grammatik (1995: 9) talks of ‘kodifizierte Norm’ and ‘Sprachgebrauch’. What interests us here is awareness of codified norms since the curricula presuppose that teachers have mastered the standard variety of German, prescribing its use in class, e.g. the curriculum for Realschulen in Baden-Württemberg (Bildungsplan für die Realschule Baden-Württemberg 1994: 11) states clearly that ‘Hochsprache’ is always to be used as the medium of instruction, and in the Lehrplan Deutsch Grundschule (1984: 73) for Rhineland-Palatinate we read:

Der jeweilige Sprachstand des Kindes ist zunächst als Sprachleistung zu respektieren. Gleichwohl ist der Gebrauch der Standardsprache konsequent anzustreben.

Parents also assume (despite the occasional scare story, e.g. Spiegel 1984) that their children will learn standard German from teachers (Davies 1995: 90). The fact that these two curricula use two different terms to refer to what we must assume is the same object is interesting and illustrates tellingly the fact that language standardisation differs from the standardisation of, for example, the width of railway tracks. One may speculate that the use of the term ‘Standardsprache’ is an attempt to avoid the evaluative implications of the prefix ‘Hoch-’ or to avoid using a term that, in central and southern Germany, is often used by lay people to refer to standard German with codified pronunciation, while ‘nach der Schrift reden’ or ‘Schriftsprache reden’ refers to using standard or standard-like grammar and vocabulary with recognisably local/regional phonology and phonetics. One of the criteria usually considered constitutive of a standard variety is that it is codified (e.g. Dittmar 1980: 134, Keller 1978: 513) and all levels of standard German are codified even if pronunciation is still subject to variability (Glück & Sauer 1990: 30), therefore it should be easy for anyone who wishes to learn the rules to do so.

There is a north-south divide in attitudes towards the codified standard variety and more regionally marked varieties of German:
Im Süden, vor allem in Bayern, Schwaben und Baden, ist der Standard stärker regional geprägt und als solcher sozial akzeptabel [...]. Zugleich besitzt hier der dialektalere Teil des Kontinuums höheres Prestige als in nördlicheren Gebieten (Schuppenhauer & Werlen 1983: 1420).

Davies (1995) found that what informants in a southern German city (Mannheim) regarded as standard German was far removed from the codified standard. Since the trainee teachers in this study are at colleges in southern Germany (Heidelberg and Karlsruhe) it will be interesting to see to what extent their norm awareness reflects attitudes we would expect in this region.

Schools are considered to play an important role in the transmission of the standard variety of German, whatever concrete form that variety may take. Hannappel and Herold do not see the school as the major transmitter of standard norms, but as an important one:

Unter den Instanzen, die den Sprachgebrauch bewußt und unbewußt beeinflussen, spielt die Schule wohl nicht die entscheidende, aber gewiß eine wichtige Rolle. Wie solche Einfußnahmen vorgenommen werden, ist wiederum abhängig vom Normbewußtsein dessen, der sich kritisch mit dem Sprachverhalten anderer auseinandersetzt (1985: 55).

Von Polenz attributes a great deal of influence to teachers when he suggests:


As Ammon (1995: 75) points out, it is improbable that most pupils use the codex of standard German personally, but they rely on “Sprachnormautoritäten” (e.g. teachers) to mediate between themselves and the codex. These factors highlight the importance of investigating the norm awareness/knowledge of teachers or, in this case, future teachers to help us to understand the processes involved in the transmission of the norms of a standard variety.

3 The norm awareness of trainee teachers in southern Germany

The informants for the present study are students at teacher training colleges (‘Pädagogische Hochschulen’) in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe (Heidelberg is on the eastern edge of the Rhine-Neckar region and Karlsruhe on the southern edge). In order to form an idea of official attitudes towards the codified norm (in pronunciation above all) I first interviewed two ‘Sprecherzieher’ at the college in Heidelberg (for practical reasons it was not possible to interview any ‘Sprecherzieher’ in Karlsruhe). All trainee teachers in Heidelberg are expected to take at least one course of ‘Sprecherziehung’. Both lecturers are from

1 Cf., too, the tables in König (1978: 134) and Besch u.a. (eds.) (1983: 1406).
southern Germany and both say they can speak a regional non-standard variety in addition to standard German (Bavarian and Swabian). Both claim that no norm is officially prescribed, which they are expected to propagate in class, however both say they are guided by the Duden-Aussprachewörterbuch and the Großes Wörterbuch der deutschen Aussprache (which they regard as more liberal). Both claim to accept regionally coloured accents: the features they mention as acceptable in classroom speech are initial voiceless \([	ext{s}]\) (where the codified standard prescribes \([\text{z}]\)), a backed \([\text{c}']\) (as long as it doesn’t sound too much like \([\text{t}]\) ) and non-aspiration of \(/\text{p},\text{t},\text{k}/\). One of the informants claims not to accept medial and final \([\text{t}]\) for standard \([\text{st}]\) or \([\text{t}]\) for standard \([\text{s}]\), but the other informant says that her approach would be to draw students’ attention to these features and encourage them to reflect on their own linguistic usage and on attitudes towards non-standard features in various regions of Germany. Both say that they have no intention of trying to eliminate the regional accents of their students, but that the aims are a widening of the linguistic repertoire and (on the part of one of the informants) an attempt to foster language awareness. The interviews therefore confirm the view that the codified pronunciation norm is not adhered to strictly in this part of Germany and is indeed not aimed at.

I then analysed questionnaires filled in by 121 trainee teachers at Heidelberg and Karlsruhe: 81 from Heidelberg and 40 from Karlsruhe. The questionnaires were distributed in classes held by the ‘Sprecherzieher’ mentioned above and in classes on German sociolinguistics and students were asked to fill them in during class. 95 women and 24 men filled in the questionnaires (two did not give their sex). Most (101) were between 20 and 25 years of age, 18 were older and two did not give their age. 61 claimed to speak dialect, 10 claimed to speak some dialect, 47 claimed to speak no dialect and three did not say. These trainees can end up in one of three school types: Grundschule, Hauptschule or Realschule. In order to have been accepted for this course of study they must have passed the Abitur. The questionnaires were designed as a means of investigating the norm awareness/knowledge of the informants. The words/constructions included in the questionnaire were chosen to establish the degree of consensus on general stylistic norms as well as the extent of acceptability (in the school domain) of local and regional forms. They were chosen on the basis of works such as Henn (1980), Hannappel & Herold (1985) and Durrell (1992). The questionnaire included words and constructions which may be described as having a limited communicative radius. The questionnaire was distributed to the students to try to discover how much uniformity exists among them regarding their awareness of the codex. In the questionnaires, the informants were required to make judgements regarding certain grammatical constructions and vocabulary. The instructions at the head of the questionnaire were: ‘Lesen Sie bitte die folgenden Sätze und korrigieren Sie sie, wenn Sie das für nötig halten. Geben Sie bitte an, ob Sie die Fehler generell oder nur in bestimmten Textsorten/Situationen verbesserungswürdig finden. Sie können den Grad der Korrektheit der Konstruktion/des Wortes mit der folgenden Skala


ausdrücken, indem Sie immer eine der folgenden Zahlen umkreisen. 1 = generell verbesserungswürdig; Sie würden immer korrigieren; der Fehler beeinflußt die Note negativ. 2 = die Konstruktion/das Wort ist akzeptabel in bestimmten Textsorten/Situationen, könnte aber die Note negativ beeinflussen, wenn sie/es unangemessen verwendet würde. 3 = völlig akzeptabel, egal in welcher Textsorte/Situation.2

Of course, the categories could have been differentiated further, but the main aim was to measure quickly how much agreement there was about the relative acceptability of certain words/constructions. Informants were also asked to comment on and explain their choice of category, but not every one did so. This highlights one of the problems of using indirect methods of data collection, the lack of control over the data, but it was decided that the advantage of being able to collect relatively large amounts of data in a short space of time outweighed this disadvantage.

3.1 Analysis of the questionnaires

The responses to the 23 sentences in the questionnaire were as follows. The horizontal rows show how many responses were 1, 2 or 3 respectively, while the vertical rows represent the numbered sentences. The responses for each sentence do not always add up to 121 (the total number of informants) since some informants occasionally left gaps.

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2 These categories are the same as those used by Hannappel & Herold (1985). The text of the questionnaire used in this study can be seen in the appendix.
There is no total consensus as regards the classification of particular words or constructions, i.e. there is not a single instance of 100% of the informants agreeing on a classification of a word or construction and in all cases all three categories have been used. The nearest we come to a consensus is when 88 out of 120 = 73% agree that ‘als’ (a dialect word meaning ‘always’, sentence 6) is totally unacceptable, but a sizeable minority (32 = 27%) still think that it would be acceptable in at least some situations. The next most unacceptable feature is the use of the dialect past participle ‘gedenkt’ for standard ‘gedacht’ (sentence 21). 71% would not accept this at all. Again, however, a sizeable minority would accept it in at least some situations, if not all. 68% also reject totally the dialect use of ‘wo’ as a relative pronoun (sentence 9)), but 32% claim to find it acceptable in certain circumstances. There is no more agreement at the other end of the acceptability scale: the largest number to agree on the total acceptability of a form are the 61% who agree that ‘brauchte’ (with mutation for standard German ‘brauchte’ as the subjunctive 2 form, sentence 7) is acceptable in every situation, but 29% would only accept it in certain situations, and 10% would not accept the form at all.

There is also considerable variability amongst the informants as regards their readiness to accept certain words or constructions, e.g. 44% of the informants' answers were (1), but the scores of individuals range from 0% choice of (1) to 87% choice of (1). The standard deviation is 18.5. There is also variability, albeit much less marked, in the readiness to accept unconditionally non-standard constructions: 13% of all answers were (3), but the scores of the individuals range from 0% to 52%. The standard deviation is 9.

It is not clear why the words and constructions are ordered as they are in the hierarchy of acceptability, e.g. the use of the dialect word ‘als’ (‘immer’) is found totally unacceptable by 73% but only 48% find the dialect word ‘Kartoffele’ (‘Kartoffeln’) totally unacceptable and only 25% find the use of the dialect word ‘mischeln’ (‘mischen’) totally unacceptable. The use of the dative case rather than the accusative with the verb ‘anrufen’ is rejected by 59%

3 The Duden-Universalwörterbuch refers to the use of ‘wo’ as a relative pronoun referring to a person or thing as not just ‘landschaftlich’, but also ‘salopp’.

4 The standard deviation is a means of calculating the degree of variability around a mean: the larger the standard deviation, the greater the variability and the less reliable the mean.
whereas the use of the conjunction ‘nachdem’ in a causal rather than a temporal sense is rejected by only 29% of the informants: both constructions are recorded in the Duden-Grammatik and Duden-Universalwörterbuch as constructions which are not acceptable in standard German, but which are common in the colloquial speech of southern Germany. There seems to be no reason for the widely differing evaluations: they are not supported by the codex. There is yet another example of a lack of agreement between the linguistic codex and the potential ‘Sprachnormautoritäten’: 52% would not accept ‘wo’ as a relative indicating time (sentence 16), although the Duden does not condemn this. What emerges here is that the classifications used in the reference works which are usually regarded as canonical do not always reflect the classifications employed by individual speakers.5

Another finding is that norm tolerance is linked to the concept of situative appropriateness: only 13% of all answers were categorised as (3) (acceptable in all situations). Most answers were categorised as (1) (always unacceptable: 44%) or as (2) (depends on situation: 43%). This indicates that the sociolinguistic concept of ‘difference rather than deficit’6 has been accepted by these informants, but the degree of tolerance expressed towards the use of regional and colloquial forms within an educational context is still slightly surprising. This tolerance is however not evenly distributed across the informants: 43% of all answers are (2), but they range from 9% up to 96%. The standard deviation is 18.

4 Norm tolerance: its role in emancipatory discourse and practice

Over the years there have been calls for greater norm tolerance, mainly as a way of encouraging speakers who do not speak standard at home to feel less alienated at school (cf. Christ u.a. 1974, Clyne 1995: 116). Those who make these calls are motivated by the fact that linguistic varieties are rarely mere instruments for transmitting information but are often imbued with symbolic and affective meanings (Ryan 1979, Neuland 1993). One of the implications of this is, as the Cox Report in England and Wales states so clearly: ‘criticism of pupils’ spoken language will be interpreted as criticism of their families and friends’ (Cox 1989: 4.50). The child’s vernacular symbolises his/her membership of a particular social group (Milroy & Milroy 1991: 109-15) and to give it up could be seen as a wish to distance oneself from that group. Moreover, 5

5 This is not too surprising, given that the codifiers themselves do not always agree on how to mark entries. According to Wernke (1997: 221), who examined the Duden-Universalwörterbuch, the Duden-Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache in 8 Bänden, Duden-Rechtschreibung, Brockhaus-Wahrig, Wahrig and Wörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache, there is no consensus in German dictionaries regarding which features should be marked as ‘Umgangssprache’.

6 The Difference theory (unlike the Deficit theory) assumes the functional equivalence of all varieties of a language, whilst accepting that they are differently evaluated by society (Dittmar 1980: 128-31).
the first variety a child learns to speak is associated with many of his/her basic experiences, and is a constitutive part of his/her identity. Those who call for norm tolerance believe that this is a way of incorporating these findings from sociolinguistics in a way that will benefit the child, and cause him/her to feel less alienated and more confident in the school environment.

In practice, norm tolerance can refer to an opening up of the codified norm so that a greater range of variants are accepted as standard and/or to the extension of the domains of non-standard speech (cf. Clyne 1995: 115-16). One of the earliest calls for an opening up of the codified norm comes from Jäger (1971: 227):

Zumindest sollte der Spielraum der Norm unter Berücksichtigung der gesprochenen Sprache und der Sprache einer bestimmten Öffentlichkeit erweitert werden [...].

He draws attention to the fact that the codified norms of standard German privilege forms that are more common in written German than in speech. In the early 1970s the SPD government in Hessen proposed new guidelines for teaching German in schools:

The Guidelines contained an emphasis on the teaching of communicative competence in whatever variety or varieties of the language the pupil has available to him/her. They attempted to separate the ability to communicate effectively from the exclusive use of Standard German in the school domain (Clyne 1995: 116).

The outcry that greeted these guidelines (Christ u.a. 1974) meant that they could not be put into practice, but this did not stop the debate about linguistic norms and their content. Augst (1982: 135-6) seems to go further than Jäger since, as well as wishing to see a greater range of variants admitted as standard (a more open norm, to use the terminology of the sixth edition of the Duden-Grammatik 1998: 5), he also wishes to see spoken German exert more influence on the development of the written language:

Bei einer demokratisch verstandenen Sprachnorm muß aber auch die präskriptive Grammatik Varianten festhalten, wenn sie der Forderung von Danes (1968: 25) gerecht werden will, daß sie „eine planmäßige und perspektivische Beeinflussung der Entwicklung der Schriftsprache“ vornehmen soll.

Neither Augst nor Jäger mentions regional variants specifically, but since very few Germans can (or wish to) produce spoken utterances with no regional features it is fair to assume that calls for a ‘democratisation’ of the codified norm imply greater tolerance of regional variation. Wagner, on the other hand, (1987: 134) refers explicitly to regional variation and stresses that it need not cause comprehension problems (one of the tenets of the ideology of standardisation (Milroy & Milroy 1991) is that a standard variety is necessary

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7 For a more detailed critique of the elitist nature of the codified norms of standard German see Jäger (1980: 375-9).
for mutual intelligibility within a state\textsuperscript{8}: ‘Auch mit der landschaftlichen Färbung, wie sie eine regionale Ausprägung der Hochsprache bietet, läßt sich eine weiträumige Kommunikation bestreiten’. We see here too that, in practice, in pronunciation at least, the codified ‘national’ norm takes on various regional forms. The positive result of this tolerance is that school pupils who do not speak standard German at home do not have such a mountain to climb when learning to speak standard German: ‘Zwar sind die Probleme im mündlichen dadurch gegenüber dem schriftlichen gemildert, daß das Standarddeutsch nicht so rigoros Äußerungsnorm ist […]’ (Ammon 1989:15).

Various studies of language use in schools illustrate how norm tolerance works in practice. For example, in Greulich’s study (1995), the teachers at a Hauptschule in Schwetzingen (not far from Heidelberg) say that what is important in oral communication is to be understood, not necessarily to speak standard, so words considered too local (e.g. ‘Grumbeere’ for ‘ Kartoffel’!) would be corrected, but not words like ‘ned’ (‘nicht’), which are perceived as supraregional.\textsuperscript{9} These teachers seem to be following Sieber and Sitta’s appeal (1986:82, 172) to be guided by ‘Sprachverständlichkeitsnormen’ not ‘Sprachrichtigkeitsnormen’ when correcting spoken language. Sieber and Sitta see this as a step towards greater norm tolerance in schools, however the approach is not unproblematic: for example, who is to decide what is comprehensible? Is it what is comprehensible to teachers without too much effort? This approach could mean transmitting norms that are as arbitrary as the ‘Sprachrichtigkeitsnormen’ and which show as much inter-teacher variability.

Another study which establishes that tolerance is practised vis à vis regional features in pronunciation is Macha (1995). He carried out a questionnaire survey of 56 primary-school teachers in the Rhineland and found that, in general, teachers tended not to correct regional divergences from standard pronunciation (1995: 81). Regional lexis was also tolerated but grammatical deviations from standard, e.g. ‘nach’ for ‘zu’, ‘wie’ as the comparative particle or using a different case from the standard were less often accepted (1995: 82). Clearly, tolerance is not extended equally to all levels of language (cf. Ammon 1989:15), although Lewandowski (1982: 18-19) seems to think that teachers have become very (too?) tolerant of deviations from the standard norm:

Eine erste Reaktion auf die soziolinguistische Normendiskussion war ein weiteres Herabsinken der Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber sprachformalen Fehlern bis zur völligen Nichtbeachtung der sprachlichen Form bei mündlichen und schriftlichen Leistungen.

It is not easy to verify such claims and to determine the extent of norm tolerance in German schools because there are few empirical studies of the
correction practices of teachers. One indication that we really are faced with greater norm tolerance might be the periodic attacks on the standard of German taught in schools (e.g. Spiegel 1984), but such complaints reflect perceptions which are not necessarily rooted in reality and they often show an undifferentiated approach to language, e.g. writing well is often reduced to the ability to spell correctly.\textsuperscript{10} As far as extending the domains of non-standard varieties is concerned: there is no doubt that the permitted domains of the dialect have been extended over the past ten or fifteen years as a result of the so-called dialect renaissance. However, what emerged in a survey of teachers of German (reported in Davies 2000a) is that the standard, as an idea, still enjoys considerable support. Even though most teachers in the survey do not insist on their pupils speaking it in class all the time they do not obviously question its privileged role in the classroom. What is true, although it cannot be proved that it is related to a relaxation of the standard norms, is that the number of pupils passing the Abitur has increased steadily (Aktuell 2000: 72).

According to Helmers (1982: 84), norm tolerance at schools is not new, but has been applied selectively and for reactionary ends:

Seit Beginn der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft wird in den Volksschulen die Hochsprache dem Volk nicht systematisch, nicht ausreichend und nicht analytisch reflexiv vermittelt, wie z.B. die amtlichen Lehrpläne zeigen.

In his view, because of the inferior quality of the teaching, the masses have often been deprived of the chance to master standard German (Helmers 1982: 85). Elsewhere he explains why a mastery of standard German is so important:

Demokratische Sprachbildung erfordert Anerkennung des Ziels der Hochsprache als Lernziel für alle Schüler. Es muß erkannt werden, daß jeder Vorenthaltung der Hochsprache Privilegien stabilisiert, weil nur die Beherrschung der Hochsprache fähig macht zur Teilnahme an den geistigen und gesellschaftspolitischen Auseinandersetzungen (Helmers 1976: 12).

Bayer (1984: 318-19) believes that the ability to express one’s thoughts in an intelligible, precise and situatively appropriate way and the ability of the listener to understand such thoughts is one of the preconditions for (i) participation in political and cultural processes (without which democracy cannot flourish), (ii) for being able to master successfully many everyday situations and (iii) for career advancement.

These views are typical of many commentators who view norm tolerance as, at best, misplaced liberalism on the part of certain academics and educators, or, at worst, a conspiracy to keep the working classes in their subordinate position. It is argued that, if children who do not speak standard German at home (who tend to be from the lower socio-economic classes) are deprived of the

\textsuperscript{10} In the Spiegel article it is not always clear what is being criticised: the perceived failure to teach pupils the skill of writing German (i.e. of producing context-independent language) or the perceived failure to teach them to use standard German (i.e. to use constructions considered stylistically acceptable in formal situations, e.g. Konjunktiv I). Much of the criticism of poor writing skills is illustrated with spelling mistakes.
opportunity to learn it systematically and to practise it regularly in the school domain, inequality of opportunity will be consolidated since children from middle-class families are more likely to learn standard German at home and to have more opportunities to improve their mastery of it. Pupils who do not master standard German (in its written and spoken manifestations) may be educationally and socially disadvantaged (Ammon 1982, Hain & Hain 1980: 44). It also feared that attempts to impart literacy will be hindered by the persistence of non-standard forms of speech.

Other critics of norm tolerance fear that tolerance of variation can ultimately lead to fragmentation of the speech community and to a narrow parochialism which militates against social and political unity. Bayer (1984: 318-19), for example, fears that communication between different groupings within German society could break down if regional dialects and sociolects were to replace the supraregional standard variety of German. For him, only the latter can fulfil an integrative function for the whole of society and ensure that an intelligible dialogue takes place between the different social groupings within Germany. This antagonism towards particularism (regarded as politically reactionary) was the basis for the energetic promotion of standard German in the GDR (Gessinger 1986) and also informs the writings of left-wing commentators in the FRG, e.g. Hain & Hain (1980: 42), who claim that to tolerate increased regionalism in speech would be a retrograde step and would be to turn the clock back to the period before the economic and political centralisation of Germany.

11 The Spiegel (1984) article mentioned above also reflects the fear that not enough stress on standard German at school can lead to a lack of facility in using abstract, context-independent language, e.g.

In der Gruppe, die gerade zusammensteckt, weiß jeder, was gemeint ist. Penible Kritiker hingegen befürchten, daß die Universalität der Sprache verlorengeht - jene Möglichkeit, beliebige Inhalte ganz unabhängig von der Clique und einer gemeinsam durchlebten Situation dem Nächstbesten mitzuteilen (Spiegel 1984:134) (see footnote 10).

However, those who argue that mutual intelligibility is only secured by means of standard German often fail to take fully into account the social and subjective dimensions of comprehension. Various studies (e.g. Haugen 1966) have established that the will to understand can play a major role in overcoming communication difficulties between speakers of different varieties. People may well claim not to understand speakers of non-standard varieties but this may be partly because the speakers of non-standard varieties are seen as people who have nothing of value to say and to whom it is therefore unnecessary to listen carefully (Bourdieu 1991: 54-5). It would, however, be unfair to hide the fact that some linguists believe that the role of extra-linguistic factors in ensuring

11 Outside the German context, Gramsci was another important left-wing theorist who believed strongly in the importance of teaching the masses to write and speak a unitary language in order to encourage greater social unity and to enable them to organise in pursuit of their political goals (Gramsci 1985: 182, 187, quoted in Crowley 1996: 45).
mutual intelligibility can be over-emphasised. Milroy (1984), for example, thinks that sociolinguists don’t know enough about cross-dialectal communication to be able to claim that miscommunication is not a problem. She shows that linguistic and non-linguistic context don’t always help speakers to avoid breakdowns. Even when the will to understand is there, problems can occur. Also, one must be aware that a lack of a common standard can cause more problems when it comes to written texts because of the relatively context-free nature of writing. In spoken interaction misunderstandings can be cleared up immediately (as long as they are recognised) but this is impossible with written texts, and for that reason it is necessary to sensitise pupils to the differences between speech and writing and encourage them to write in a way that takes account of the needs of the reader.

If we sum up the arguments relating to the disadvantages suffered by non-standard-speakers in school and society we see that they refer mainly to a lack of access to literacy, a lack of linguistic and sociolinguistic precision, lack of confidence and, consequently, lack of power. However, the arguments are weakened when their proponents do not differentiate between the different realisations of language (speech and writing) and neglect the social dimension of linguistic usage.

With regard to literacy: Barbour (1987: 234) shows that even children whose parents are highly educated and socially successful have to learn the rules of standard written German: they cannot simply write as they speak (see, too, Rosenberg 1986: 222). Teachers should therefore be able to differentiate between errors in written German that are due to interference from regional non-standard dialects and those that are due to interference from spoken forms of German.

It is not clear why precision in language cannot be achieved with a more open norm. To equate non-standard varieties with lack of precision in expression fails to take into account the fact that such varieties are usually used in speech and in situations where mutual knowledge is assumed, therefore the utterances tend to lack explicitness and are relatively context-dependent. It is, however, not true that speakers of standard varieties use language ‘precisely’ in all situations (Labov 1969). There is no doubt that it is extremely important for children to learn to use language in an abstract and precise way, above all when producing written texts, which need to be context-independent, and therefore more explicit and precise than speech, but learning to write effectively is not synonymous with learning standard German. Trudgill (1975: 79-81) (with reference to Britain) advocates producing dialect tolerance and linguistic security rather than teaching children to speak standard English, but he does not question the value of teaching them to read and write standard.12

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12 In the German-speaking world, Sieber & Sitta (1986: 121-36) stress the importance of distinguishing between the requirements of speech and writing and of not neglecting the skills associated with effective oral communication.
Another argument against too much norm tolerance is that the standard variety is more appropriate for certain purposes and certain situations. The theoretical basis for this ‘appropriateness model is the ‘difference’ theory of linguistic variation: linguistic varieties are different but functionally equivalent. This does not prevent them from being subject to differing social evaluations, but these evaluations are seldom questioned (Cameron 1995: 235, Dittmar 1980: 128-31, Lippi-Green 1997: 106-13) and the socio-historical factors which have contributed to the present-day sociolinguistic situation are rarely discussed with pupils (Davies 2000b), so that the arbitrary and non-linguistic nature of many judgements about speech varieties are not exposed.\textsuperscript{13} There are linguistic consequences of social evaluation, e.g. varieties which are not used in formal/official/public situations are often less elaborated (‘ausgebaut’, Kloss 1967) than those varieties which are used in such situations. Pupils ought to be made aware of the interplay between social and linguistic facts, in order to see that patterns of language use are dynamic, not static (Bhatt & Martin-Jones 1992: 292): speakers can elaborate their variety should they wish to do so.

Honey refers to the importance of increasing self-confidence as a step towards the empowerment of pupils:

The principles of grammar (presumably standard English grammar: WVD) [...] allowed their possessor to feel ‘on a footing of equality with those on whom chance or fortune has bestowed the choicest favours’ in material terms [...] (Honey 1997: 259, quoting Marcus Davis 1865).

He also says:

[...] causing children to learn standard English is an act of empowerment which will give them access to a whole world of knowledge and to an assurance of greater authority in their dealings with the world outside their own homes [...] (1997: 42).

No one wishes to withhold from children the confidence that comes from increased knowledge and therefore no one argues against teaching children to read standard German (or English). It is, however, more difficult to understand why a child’s ability to express him/herself confidently in speech has to be linked to standard German, except for social reasons, i.e. presumably Honey believes that a child who speaks standard or standard-like German is more likely to be listened to in school (Bourdieu 1991: 54-5): if a variety elicits a negative emotive response from the teachers this might well affect their willingness to listen and take the content of the utterance seriously (Lippi-Green 1997: 111).\textsuperscript{14} Increasing self-confidence is an important step towards empowerment, but it seems unfair (and self-defeating) to put the whole responsibility for achieving it on the child without demanding that society play its role by questioning its attitudes towards certain linguistic varieties. Devaluing and stigmatising linguistic varieties which

\textsuperscript{13} Davies (2000b) discusses critiques of the appropriateness model in more detail.

\textsuperscript{14} The quotation from Davis used by Honey illustrates the false logic underlying Honey’s assumption that a mastery of standard English automatically brings with it social power. Davis uses the verb ‘feel’, i.e. those from the working-classes who learn to speak like the middle classes can ‘feel’ equal, but this is a false consciousness and not the same thing as ‘being’ equal.
are intimately bound up with a child’s identity are surely not effective ways of fostering self-confidence.

Whether a standard variety can function effectively as ‘social cement’ (Honey 1997: 243) depends on whether it is regarded as the common property of all or as the property of a small group. Since reading and writing are not natural activities in the same way as speech is, children do not have the same emotive reaction to acquiring literacy skills as they do to acquiring spoken standard German (Milroy & Milroy 1991: 65), which is often associated with particular social groups (e.g. northern Germans/arrogant people), with formal and official situations, and with the function of creating and maintaining social distance (Davies 1995), especially if realised with codified pronunciation features. These connotations of the standard variety can affect pupils’ willingness to learn it and it is important that teachers are aware of the linguistic value systems of their pupils if they are to have any chance of successfully breaking down the attitudinal barriers to standard German that exist. These barriers can be problematic, not just because they can affect the willingness to acquire and use spoken standard German (which is not such a problem if we can engender greater tolerance towards variation on the part of educators and employers), but because a lack of tolerance works both ways, and pupils and teachers who speak standard or standard-like varieties of German can also suffer from linguistic prejudice.15 Pupils should not leave school without having discussed the social-indexical nature of linguistic variation and its role in the speech community. As to whether we need a standard variety as social cement: it is extremely useful to have a standardised variety for reading and writing, but the need for homogeneity in speech is less clear as has been shown above, and the problem of fragmentation in contemporary Germany is surely exaggerated. Moreover, the belief that national cohesion is only possible by means of one standard variety ignores cases like Switzerland where four national languages co-exist with non-standard varieties of each of those languages and where, despite some tension, there is little prospect of the break-up of the confederation into four or more ethnic/linguistic groups.

5 Conclusions

What inspired this research was Cameron’s statement that we don’t know how or even whether the norms of standard English are inculcated by teachers, although we tend to assume that they are ‘Sprachnormautoritäten’, especially of course if they are teachers of English, or German in this case. In order to try to answer these questions for German I analysed some results of a survey that aimed to investigate the norm awareness of trainee teachers in an area of

15 One of the ‘Sprecherzieher’ interviewed said that she draws students’ attention to the fact that teachers who speak standard German with a class of non-standard-dialect-speakers may have problems because they may be perceived as unapproachable and arrogant.
Germany where non-standard regional varieties are still widely spoken. What emerges is that, despite the highly codified nature of standard German, there is a substantial amount of disagreement concerning the concrete manifestation of the norm.

The analysis of the questionnaires shows that there is a great deal of variability when it comes to classifying the constructions and words in them. There is a lack of agreement at both ends of the scale, i.e. on what is acceptable and on what is to be rejected out of hand as unsuitable for the school domain. The classifications made by the informants are not always explicable in terms of the codex and neither is it the case that all the informants are equally tolerant or strict in their application of the codified rules: there is substantial inter-group variability, a finding which provides support for Cameron’s misgivings regarding the assumptions made about the role of teachers as transmitters of standard norms.

This variable tolerance could be a problem in that it could confuse the pupils and might affect the final mark awarded. It could also be interpreted as an argument for greater adherence to the codified norm, since that would seem to guarantee more consistency. In my opinion, however, it is an argument for more discussion (in training colleges and schools) of the content of the norm to be transmitted at school and of the criteria to be applied in correcting and marking written and spoken work and an argument for encouraging teacher training colleges to familiarise students with the regional non-standard speech forms they are most likely to encounter.

Norm tolerance can contribute to an emancipatory education as long as it is not merely the accidental by-product of a lack of awareness/knowledge of the codified norm on the part of teachers. However, it needs to be part of every pupil’s linguistic education. This is especially important in the German context because of the selective nature of the education system: if there is greater ‘Sprachnormenfrömmigkeit’ (Durrell 1999: 303) in Gymnasien and more norm tolerance in other school types, then this could lead to a ‘volkstümliche Hochsprache’ and a ‘normierte Hochsprache’ (cf. Mattheier 1980:128), the latter with more prestige than the former. Since there is still a link between socio-economic class and access to Realschule or Gymnasium, such a development could consolidate linguistic differences rather than lessen them.  

Most of the arguments against increased norm tolerance are social, rather than linguistic, but they are not therefore to be underestimated. We will do pupils no favours if we transmit to them an ahistorical and asocial approach to variation. It is argued that pupils are entitled to be taught standard English or German. It can also be argued that they are equally entitled to learn about the social embeddedness of language and about the way in which the uneven distribution of power in society is reflected in the distribution of language practices (Bourdieu 1991). This includes making them aware of the advantages

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16 The studies Durrell refers to were carried out in Gymnasien.
that mastery of standard German can bring in contemporary German society and explaining to them that going against dominant conventions, i.e. using language ‘inappropriately’, can be costly (Janks & Ivanic 1992: 330). However, it is possible to help pupils to realise that it is possible to question and even change linguistic conventions that they may have taken for granted as a natural order, and this can be empowering (Janks & Ivanic 1992). It is not easy to challenge what is seen as a natural order (cf. the discussion about the reform of German orthography) and teachers may be uneasy about moving away from a strict norm that divides linguistic features up clearly into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and leaves little room for individual interpretation of the rules: after all, life is simpler when the decisions have been made for one, especially when one is a busy teacher with dozens of essays to mark. However, as Kahl writes in an editorial criticising the FAZ’s decision to revert to the old spelling:


This move towards a more elastic order is also mentioned by Linke (2000), who claims that, nowadays, individuals have more freedom to interpret situations as formal/informal and are not as much guided by community norms as used to be the case. If we want people to use this increased freedom wisely, and in a way that shows respect and tolerance towards others, we need to encourage more reflection on language and on its role in the formation of individual identity and in social life.

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Standardisation and the school: norm tolerance in the educational domain


Standardisation and the school: norm tolerance in the educational domain


Lesen Sie bitte die folgenden Sätze und korrigieren Sie sie, wenn Sie das für nötig halten. Geben Sie bitte an, ob Sie die Fehler generell oder nur in bestimmten Textsorten/Situationen verbessерungswürdig finden. Sie können den Grad der Korrektheit der Konstruktion/des Wortes mit der folgenden Skala ausdrücken, indem Sie immer eine der folgenden Zahlen umkreisen.

1 = generell verbessungswürdig; Sie würden immer korrigieren; der Fehler beinflußt die Note negativ.

2 = die Konstruktion/das Wort ist akzeptabel in bestimmten Textsorten/Situationen, könnte aber die Note negativ beeinflussen, wenn sie/es unangemessen verwendet würde.

3 = völlig akzeptabel, egal in welcher Textsorte/Situation.


1 2 3

Anmerkung: Diese Konstruktion würde ich nur in mündlichen Äußerungen unkorrigiert lassen.

1. Die Antworten auf diese Frage waren weniger gut wie die auf einige andere Fragen.

1 2 3

2. Im allgemeinen finde ich, daß Fachleute sich verständlich ausdrücken, weil man kann nicht erwarten, daß die Laien sie sonst verstehen.

1 2 3

3. Trotzdem sie meine Freundin ist, weiß ich nicht, wo sie jetzt ist.

1 2 3

5. Man braucht nicht nach England fahren, um Englisch zu üben.

6. Die Kinder spielen als dort.


8. Ich war stundenlang an der Haltestelle gestanden, bis der Bus endlich gekommen ist.


10. Wenn sie nicht soviel lernen täte, könnte sie besser Fußball spielen.

11. Mit drei Liter Milch komme ich aus.

12. Ich rufe den Polizist.

13. Wir hatten der Oma angerufen.


15. Er kam aber auch nicht weiter wie Edmund.

16. Es war wieder der Tag, wo das Fußballspiel der Kinder stattfand.

17. Wir aßen so arg, daß kaum noch Wurst da war.
18. Du mußt gut mischeln, bevor du die Karten ausgibst.

19. Der Jürgen schaut morgen vorbei und bringt dann die Kartoffele mit.

20. Ich hab's Buch net dabei.


22. Ich üb, daß ich des lern.

23. Fahrst du mit meinem Auto?

An welcher Schulart unterrichten Sie: Gymnasium/Realschule/Hauptschule

Alter:

Geschlecht: Männlich/Weiblich

Sprechen Sie Dialekt: Ja/Nein

Wenn ja, welchen?

Stammen Sie aus der Pfalz: Ja/Nein

Wenn nicht, woher stammen Sie?

Aberystwyth

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